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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: MALIKI PUSHING DIPLOMATIC SOLUTION IN BASRA,
WORKING TO FILL SECURITY MINISTER POSTS

Classified By: Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

¶1. (C) Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki told the Ambassador in a brief May 22 meeting that he plans to push for urgent action to find a political solution to the deteriorating security situation in Basra. Maliki said that he believes the crux of the problem is a tribal conflict between Muhammad Falaq (the Sistani representative in Basra) and the Basra governor. Maliki said he believes that any Mehdi Army elements involved in the violence are acting outside Muqtada al-Sadr's control. He said Sadrists Salam al-Maliki is playing a positive role in pushing for calm. Maliki acknowledged SCIRI-Fadhila differences in Basra but doubted that they are a cause of the violence. The Ambassador urged the PM to act rapidly to resolve the situation and warned that the Coalition soon would have to consider options to improve security for the British Consulate and Regional Embassy Office there or reduce its diplomatic presence. The latter option would not send the right message - especially in the aftermath of the formation of the unity government.

¶2. (C) Maliki said he remains determined to fill his vacant security portfolios rapidly. He said he met Tawfiq al-Yasiri the previous day and was impressed that Yasiri is the right candidate for Interior. Maliki said that Yasiri still faces opposition inside the Shia Coalition, which he (Maliki) would face down in a leadership meeting that evening. Maliki said he remains focused on Muhammad Bara Najib al-Rubaie for the Defense post. The Ambassador informed him that Rubaie would be arriving in Baghdad, with U.S. transportation help, on the morning of May 24. Maliki said he would look forward to receiving Rubaie immediately and making a decision. Maliki said that he had met that day with Tawafiq dissidents Khalaf Alayan and Abd al-Nasser al-Janabi, in addition to Muhammad al-Dayni, a representative of Saleh Mutlak's Hewar Front. Maliki said they had asked him to dismiss and replace several ministers affiliated with the Iraqi Islamic Party and to appoint Khalaf Alayan as MinDef. Maliki said that he told them that their request was unreasonable and that he remains committed to finding capable independents for the security portfolios.

¶3. (C) Maliki said that he welcomed the U.S. offer of help in expanding the Iraqi PM's ties to regional states but that he feels he already is off to a strong start. Maliki said that most countries in the region had passed invitations for him to visit but that he remains determined to launch and organize his government before setting out on any trips. Maliki voiced his continued hope that the U.S. would play a driving role in the international compact campaign for Iraq even as the UN is vested more formally with the responsibility for leading the effort. Maliki welcomed Embassy efforts to distribute materials to all new ministers describing current Coalition efforts in their respective fields and outlining the path to further cooperation.

